

**FOSTER CARE  
STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT  
THREE-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT  
FY 2017-FY 2019**

May 2020

**S**ince early March 2020, the widespread community transmission of the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, has touched all of us on personal and professional levels. I am enormously proud of the staff at ACS and our partner foster care agencies who are carrying out the essential work of strengthening and supporting families—all while facing the uncertainty, fear, and constant changes that have been a part of managing this crisis.

In the face of adversity, we remain focused on our forward-looking reforms to improve the experience and outcomes of children in foster care. These reforms and accomplishments are summarized in this Foster Care Strategic Blueprint FY2017-FY2019 progress report, which we are submitting in response to Local Law 143 of 2016, as a comprehensive update to ACS's five-year Foster Care Strategic Blueprint. We are including additional relevant updates since the completion of this report below.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, and cognizant of the demands on our provider agencies, ACS has postponed the release of our foster care RFP that was originally planned for Spring 2020. We are now planning to extend current contracts for one year, with new contracts to commence July 1, 2022. In the meantime, we are fully committed to aggressively advancing our work to improve case practice and outcomes across the foster care continuum—from family reunification to kinship placement to adoption to safety of youth in care to supporting older youth in care. Through our Foster Care Strategic Blueprint and the work of the Foster Care Task Force, ACS has achieved measurable positive results, including fewer children in foster care; reduced length of stay in foster care; increased kinship placement and kinship guardianship; increased foster home recruitment; and expanded programming for older youth. We made a targeted investment of \$12 million into our residential care continuum to bolster providers' infrastructure and allow us to implement and test evidence-based models ahead of the foster care procurement. Our work is continuing with additional creativity during the current COVID crisis and will continue with urgency moving forward.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required ACS and our provider agencies to adapt foster care case practice to best serve the children in foster care and their families, while accommodating public health requirements. Provider agencies and their frontline staff have made heroic efforts throughout this crisis to provide tender care for children, and to support and strengthen families. On a daily basis, agencies are checking in with children, parents, and foster parents (doing so virtually when health concerns require it), helping acquire technology so that quality Family Time by phone and video can take place when not safe to do in person, supporting remote learning, and continuing all efforts to achieve safety and permanency for every child and youth in foster care.

To continue to focus on family reunification and permanency, despite court hearing restrictions that the Family Court has imposed during this public health crisis, ACS has been closely collaborating with our provider agencies and the attorneys who represent children and parents. We are proactively reviewing cases where progression towards reunification may be safe and in the child's best interests, such as expanded visits, modification of orders of protection, or reunification

from foster care on a trial or final basis. If all parties agree, we can present these resolutions to the presiding Family Court judge without the need to wait for court hearings. In this way, we have continued prioritizing safe and timely reunifications, even while court appearances are limited during this crisis. In addition, we are continuing work all relevant adoption and kinship guardianship processes so that we remain ready to proceed on these cases when the Family Court resumes hearings to finalize adoptions and kinship guardianships.

To help keep staff, children and families, and our communities safe during this public health emergency, ACS has implemented targeted measures with support and guidance from health experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Health + Hospitals, and other city and state agency partners. We have dispatched thousands of personal protective equipment (PPE) items. We have continually circulated timely and relevant guidance about necessary practice changes to promote health and safety, which are easy for provider agency staff and other partners to access from a dedicated COVID-19 information page on our website. We equipped ACS and provider agency staff with technology to work remotely as much as possible. Additionally, we have advanced regulatory and financial flexibility to allow our staff and contracted provider agencies to adapt while meeting the needs of staff and families. And we ensured that essential child welfare staff and foster parents have access to emergency child care as they selflessly take care of others.

As we all move forward together and recover from the crisis, we are grateful for the ongoing support and partnership from the New York City Council to help us meet the needs of children and families.

Sincerely,

David A. Hansell, Commissioner



**D**uring the last three years – through a series of targeted reforms, and in partnership with a range of stakeholders – ACS has significantly improved New York City’s foster care system. The reforms ACS has put in place build on many years of work, and they have measurably improved the experience and outcomes of children in foster care.

ACS is aggressively implementing a Foster Care Strategic Blueprint that outlines our key priorities and strategies for improving case practice and safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families in the foster care system. Our work includes the implementation of evidence-based models to address trauma, mental health and other challenges faced by children and families; strategies to improve reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship outcomes; cutting-edge training and professional development for the child welfare workforce; and rigorous foster care agency monitoring and continuous quality improvement systems.

This focus, combined with unprecedented investments by the de Blasio administration to strengthen child welfare, as well as support and partnership from the Foster Care Interagency Task Force, has yielded strong and measurable results including:

- Fewer children in foster care
- Reduced length of stay in foster care
- Increased kinship placement and kinship guardianship
- Increased foster home recruitment
- Expanded programming for older youth

This report summarizes our work over the past three years and the progress we have made. This progress would not be possible without the dedicated work of ACS staff, the foster care agencies, the legal advocates and the Family Court, all of whom are working day in and day out to improve outcomes for children and families. We are also deeply appreciative of our foundation partners, City Council, and other stakeholders, and, critically, the voices of youth and families that inform our work.

In FY 2020, we are continuing and expanding the strategies that have proven effective -- including our major initiatives that are reducing length of stay in foster care, recruiting high-quality foster homes and improving the experience youth have in foster care, and implementing new strategies and expanded services such as Fair Futures, an initiative that will substantially increase education and employment services for children and youth in care. Significantly, during the next two years, we will re-vision, re-procure and re-contract the entire foster care system, and will utilize this transformational opportunity to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, youth and families.

Thank you for your partnership and we look forward to continuing this important work.

Sincerely,

David A. Hansell, Commissioner

Julie Farber, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Family Permanency Services



## Three Year Progress Highlights

### FEWER CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

- The number of New York City children in foster care at the end of FY 2019 reached a historic low of 8,300, down from 9,900 just three years ago and 16,000 a decade ago.

### REDUCED LENGTH OF STAY IN FOSTER CARE

- The number of children in foster care for two years or more dropped by 22% from FY 2017 to FY 2019.
- An independent evaluation by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago released in 2019 found that ACS and its foster care agencies have reduced length of stay in foster care by 9% (an average of 50 days per child).

### INCREASED KINSHIP PLACEMENT AND KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP

- Research shows that children fare best with kin (relatives, close family friends, or other people who are already in a child's life). From FY 2017 to FY 2019, ACS and its foster care agency partners increased the proportion of children in foster care placed with kin from 31% to 39%.
- Since the KinGAP program was established, ACS has greatly increased the number of children exiting foster care to kinship guardianship. From FY 2017 to FY 2019, 1,067 children exited foster care to KinGAP.

### INCREASED FOSTER HOME RECRUITMENT

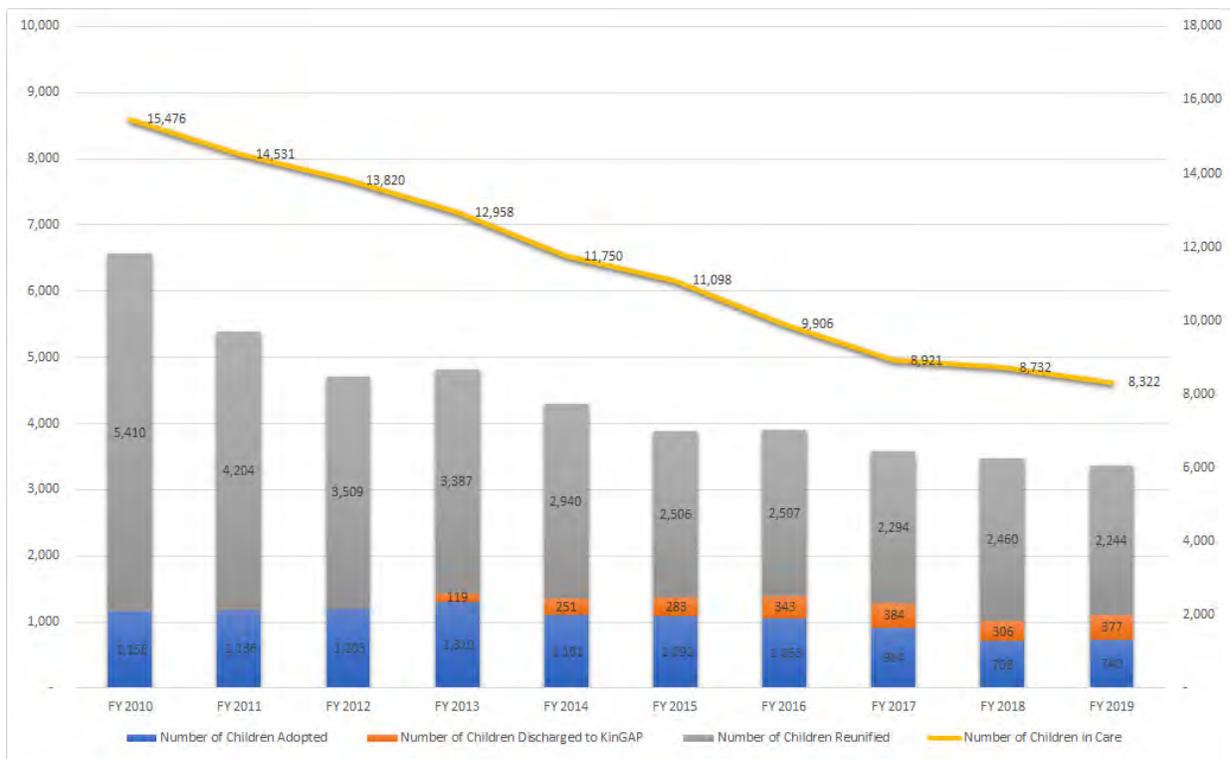
- From FY 2017 to FY 2019, ACS increased the number of newly certified foster homes by 50%, turning around a previous six-year decline in the number of new foster homes recruited.

### EXPANDED PROGRAMMING FOR OLDER YOUTH

- During the last three years, ACS significantly increased specialized education and employment programming for older youth through our Office of Education and Employment Initiatives and partnerships with DYCD, DOE, CUNY, Columbia University, FirstStar, multiple foundations and other partners. Youth are participating in mentored internships, summer youth employment, career clubs, college readiness programs the CUNY dorm program and more.

# No Time to Wait: Improving Permanency Outcomes

Under our No Time to Wait initiative, ACS and its foster care agency partners implement a range of strategies to improve permanency outcomes -- helping children exit foster care to permanent families through reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship. As shown in the chart below, ACS has made significant progress, dramatically reducing the number of children in foster care and narrowing the gap between the number of children in care and the number exiting to permanency. ACS has achieved this through continued investment in prevention services, successfully keeping children safely out of foster care and implementing focused strategies to improve permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care.



## DATA DRIVEN

ACS works closely with national experts including Action Research, Public Catalyst and Chapin Hall to analyze and enhance practice across all areas of permanency. We review case practice and administrative processes and analyze data; identify strengths and areas for improvement; implement targeted strategies based on best practices; measure the impact of those strategies; and use that information to closely monitor and improve performance across the system. ACS meets regularly with Family Court staff to share data, discuss trends and identify opportunities to improve permanency outcomes. All of this

information drives our work to improve outcomes for children and families.

## REUNIFICATION

The majority of children who enter foster care return home to their families. Almost 7,000 children were reunified in FY 2017 - 2019. ACS has continued to invest significant resources to improve Family Time (a.k.a. visiting) between families and children in foster care, strengthen parent engagement and support families and keep children safe in the process of reunification.

### SAFELY REUNIFYING FAMILIES

In FY 2018, ACS began providing its foster care agencies with \$6 million in additional funding specifically to develop enhanced services that better support families as they prepare to safely reunify. This includes helping families connect to community supports, providing access to an array of services that build on family strengths and increase family capacities, and addressing concrete needs such as child care, housing supports or other resources.

FY 2019 was the first full year that foster care agencies received this funding. As a result, foster care agencies have hired dedicated staff, such as Parent Advocates, Reunification Specialists and Family Coaches to give emotional and practical support to parents and to provide hands-on guidance as they work toward reunification; materials have been developed to better orient parents to the child welfare system; and foster care agencies have expanded their peer support networks. These approaches reflect a growing national evidence base that the utilization of parent mentors and peer resources support safe reunification.

As foster care agencies continue to explore innovative and practical ways to use these funds, ACS will continue to assess and identify strength-based and results-oriented practices that could be expanded system-wide in support of timely and safe reunification.

### FAMILY TIME (VISITING)

Frequent, high-quality Family Time is essential to supporting safe and timely reunification. Family Time promotes child well-being, promotes family engagement in the permanency planning process and increases the likelihood of reunification.

- **Family Time Training:** In the past three years, ACS's Family Visiting Unit has delivered nearly 150 Family Time trainings and nearly 30 Visit Coaching trainings citywide. These trainings are designed to equip ACS and foster care agency staff to support parents and children in spending frequent, high-quality time together as they work toward reunification.
- **New Family Time Tools for Foster Care Agencies:** ACS has developed and implemented two tools -- one to assess and improve visiting spaces and one to assess appropriate levels of supervision.
- **Enhanced Family Time Pilot:** A cohort of foster care agencies has received additional funding to implement strategies for improving Family Time. Strategies include visit coaching, support for families to visit in locations outside the agency and Family Time kits with supplies to encourage positive family interactions.

- **Family to Family:** Foster parents play a critical role in supporting and working closely with parents. ACS is working to strengthen and support the relationships between foster parents and parents through a multi-faceted approach that includes providing training staff and foster parents, decreasing logistical burdens around Family Time, strengthening parent engagement and implementing foster parent recruitment and retention strategies that support strong relationships between foster parents and families. In FY 2019, parent advocacy organization Rise provided training on its 'Building A Bridge' curriculum focused on creating positive relationships between parents and foster parents (i.e., Family to Family) and worked with foster care agencies to enhance Family Time and other areas of frontline practice that strengthen early parent engagement and support safe reunification. This work is continuing and expanding in FY 2020.

## ADOPTION

- 2,540 children were adopted in FY 2017-FY 2019. As the number of children in foster care has declined, so has the number of children awaiting adoption.
- The majority of children who are eligible for adoption, (i.e., children who are legally freed for adoption and have a permanency goal of adoption), are already placed with foster parents who will adopt them.
- We have significantly improved administrative processes that are required to complete adoptions, including streamlining the adoption subsidy and birth certificates processes, resulting in faster subsidy approvals and provision of birth certificates. Prior to these streamlining efforts, only five % of adoption subsidies were approved within 30 days; now, 70% are. Birth certificates used to take several weeks to secure, this has now been reduced to one week. We have also implemented management tools that foster care agencies are using to review cases and identify and respond to trends. ACS provides case consultation to foster care agencies on specific cases, as well as program-level technical assistance to enhance case practice, business process and performance management.

## PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DAVE THOMAS FOUNDATION FOR ADOPTION

In partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation and our foster care agencies, we have significantly expanded the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) child-focused adoption recruitment model. The goal of WWK is to increase the number of older children and children with special needs who exit foster care to permanent families. Over the past two years, the WWK initiative has grown to include 41 total recruiters, 576 total children served, and 113 matches made between children and pre-adoptive or kinship caregivers. While the legal process to finalize these arrangements takes time, 21 WWK children have already left foster care to permanent families. Through this \$11 million partnership, in FY 2020, a total of 43 WWK recruiters are working across the city to identify forever families for children in foster care.

## OPEN ADOPTION

Open Adoption is a form of adoption where there is an ongoing relationship between members of the adoptive family and members of the birth family. Open adoption offers a way for many families to develop and sustain authentic relationships

with one another that are centered on the child’s well-being and that can contribute to the well-being of all family members. ACS has implemented a range of initiatives during the past three years to promote open adoption, including providing training to all foster care agencies.

In the context of the legal system, open adoptions can be legally enforceable through “conditional surrenders,” in which a parent relinquishes his/her parental rights based on certain conditions such as maintaining contact with his/her child. The proportion of adoptions that involved a conditional surrender increased from 31% in 2016 to 37% in 2017 and then declined to 35% in both 2018 and 2019, which is still higher than the baseline in FY 2016. **These data suggest that there has been an increase in open adoptions** since 2016 in the context of the legal system. It’s important to note that open adoptions can always exist informally through agreement among the parents, adoptive parents and children.

## KINGAP

ACS’s efforts to increase placement with relatives and family friends includes a strong focus on exploring a child’s entire support network and engaging potential resources. Living with kin not only reduces trauma but also creates the possibility of KinGAP as a permanency option for children.

Effective March 12, 2018, the New York State KinGAP legislation was expanded to allow other adults with an established positive relationship with the child, such as family friends, teachers, or neighbors, to become eligible for KinGAP. Additionally, the new legislation extended eligibility for KinGAP subsidy payments until youth reach age 21, regardless of the age at which kinship guardianship was legally granted. ACS provided extensive training and information to foster care agencies to ensure that families citywide could benefit from this legislative change. ACS shares monthly data on progress with foster care agencies and offers case-specific and program-level technical assistance related to KinGAP.

In FY 2017, 384 children exited care to KinGAP. The following year, despite a slowdown while waiting for the new legislation to take effect, 306 KinGAPs were achieved. In FY 2019, 377 children reached permanency through KinGAP. This is a significant increase from FY 2013, when KinGAP first began, and 119 children exited to KinGAP.



# Enhancing Work with Children and Families: Strong Families

## STRONG FAMILIES

In 2014, ACS launched its largest foster care improvement initiative ever, Strong Families NYC (SFNYC), which was made possible via the Title IV-E demonstration project using flexible funding provided through a federal waiver initiative. ACS lowered caseworker/supervisory caseloads implemented a universal trauma screening and increased the use of evidence-based models.

## RESULTS OF SFNYC

An independent evaluation conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago found SFNYC resulted in the following:

### Shorter stays in foster care

Children in foster care during the waiver spent **9% fewer days** in care than children served prior to the waiver. This is an average of 50 fewer days in foster care.

### Improved Parenting

Caregivers who participated in one of the key waiver evidence-based interventions, Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC) demonstrated **increased levels of parenting sensitivity and nurturance post-ABC**. Of caregivers showing lowering sensitivity levels prior to ABC, 70% showed an increase in sensitivity after they completed ABC.

## LOW CASELOADS

Prior to the Strong Families initiative, case planners were carrying caseloads of 18-20 children and supervisor to worker ratios were 1:5. ACS reduced case planner caseloads by almost half to 10-12 children and supervisor ratios to 1:4. In FY 2018, the average caseload was 11.41 and the average supervisory ratio was 3.79. Caseload averages and supervisory ratio expectations continued to be maintained in FY 2019. For FY 19, the caseload average was 10.98 and the supervisory ratio was 3.91.

## TRAUMA SCREENING

Children who enter family foster care are screened to assess their level of exposure to trauma using a **nationally recognized screening tool**. This tool, the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths-New York (CANS-NY), helps agencies to identify the needs and strengths of each child and caregiver involved in a child's life. Chapin Hall's final report found that two-thirds of children admitted to SFNYC agencies received at least one CANS-NY during the waiver period. Furthermore, as a result of sharing data and best practices with foster care agencies, almost all of the children who were eligible to have a follow-up reassessment CANS-NY received one. As of August 2018, 83.2% of children in regular foster care had at least one completed assessment within the last six months and as of June 2019, 79.7% of children had a completed CANS-NY.

## ATTACHMENT AND BIOBEHAVIORAL CATCH-UP (ABC)

Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC), a research-proven intervention for improving parent/child interactions to reduce the effects of traumatic stress on children, is now available to all children ages 6 months to four years old while they are in foster care and when they are reunified with their parents. Since the start of ABC in 2015, **more than 2000 children have been referred to the model and over 1300 began participating.**

## PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Partnering for Success (PfS) expands access to mental health resources for foster children and improves the integration of child welfare and mental health services. **More than 1,300 child welfare and mental health staff have been trained in Partnering for Success since 2015.** In addition to learning the PfS framework, mental health clinicians receive extensive training in the evidence-based model Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Plus (CBT+). CBT+ is an effective mental treatment for children and families in addressing depression, anxiety, behavior and trauma. As a result of this training, **more than 8700 children in foster care have been screened for CBT+ Services since 2015.**



## Home Away from Home: Improving Foster Care Placements to Enhance the Safety, Permanency and Well-Being of Children

Our goal is to ensure that children are safe and receiving the highest quality of care in their foster care placements, and foster parents (both kinship and non-kinship) are receiving the supports they need. In addition to significant ACS resources, our Home Away from Home initiative has received major support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation as well as Casey Family Programs and a collaborative of five foundations - New York Community Trust, Redlich Horwitz Foundation, Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, Joseph Leroy & Ann C. Warner Fund and Tiger Foundation. ACS works closely with national experts Action Research and Public Catalyst to implement the Home Away from Home initiative.

In FY 2019, more than 98% of foster homes had no incidents of indicated child neglect or abuse. ACS takes every allegation of maltreatment in foster care very seriously. Every allegation is fully investigated by the Division of Child Protection to make certain that children are safe. When ACS identifies concerns with safety performance by one of its foster care agencies, ACS mandates a safety improvement plan; the failure of an agency to improve leads directly to heightened monitoring or corrective action status. The HAFH initiative is designed to enhance our foster home screening, recruitment and support processes systemwide in order to ensure that children are safe and thriving.



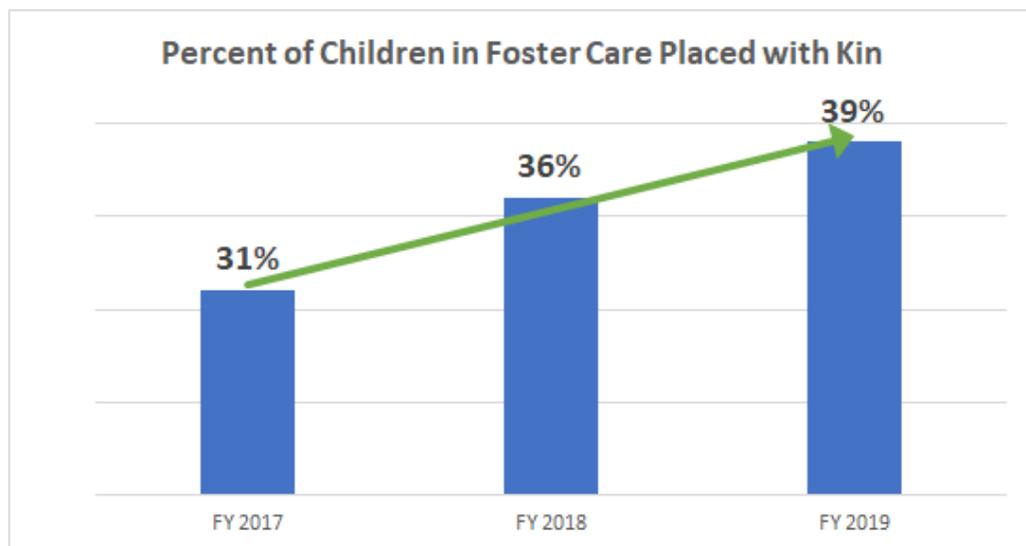
## KINSHIP PLACEMENT

National research shows that children in foster care fare best when placed with kin:

- Children placed with kin have greater placement stability.
- Kinship care helps to preserve community and family connections.
- Placement with kin helps reduce trauma and leads to higher rates of behavioral and emotional well-being.
- Children and youth in kinship care are more likely than children and youth in foster care to achieve permanency overall through reunification, adoption, or guardianship.
- Additionally, children placed in kinship homes are less likely to re-enter foster care after exiting to permanency.

### RESULTS:

During the last two years, ACS increased the proportion of children in foster care placed with kin from 31% to 39%



### KEY STRATEGIES:

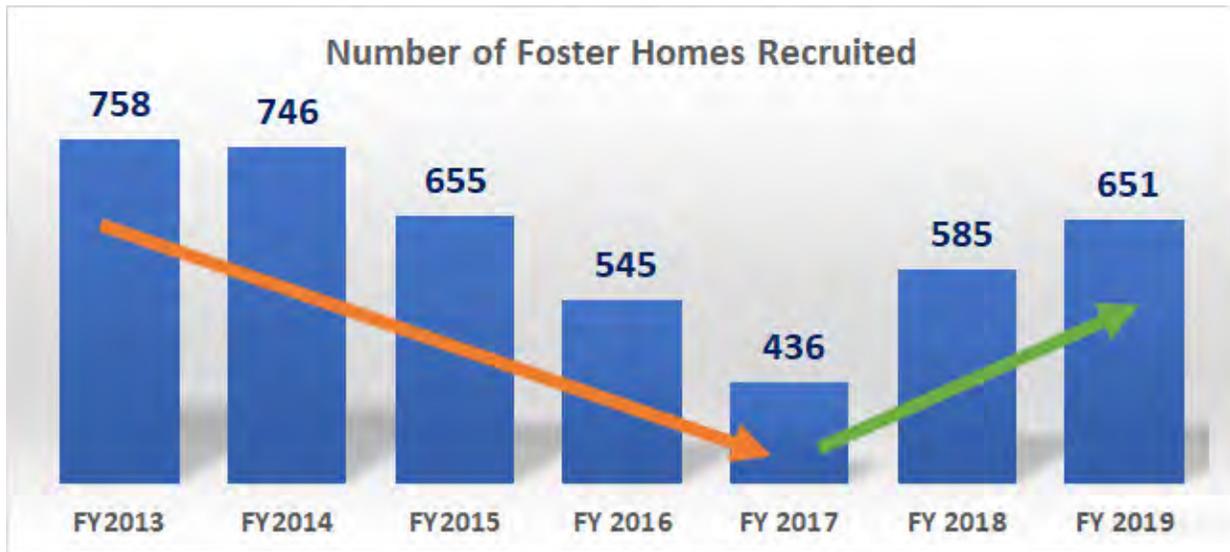
- ACS established 10 new Kinship Specialist positions in the ACS Division of Child Protection (DCP). These staff have the dedicated function of finding and engaging kin caregivers for children entering foster care. ACS engaged nationally known kinship care organization A Second Chance to provide training to these staff, and we are providing ongoing training resources to existing and new DCP staff on kin finding strategies and best practices.
- ACS implemented an information campaign called “Find Family and Friends First,” which reinforces for staff that kinship placement is a priority and provides tools for helping to identify possible kinship placements.
- A cohort of foster care agencies have received additional funding to test kin placement and support strategies such as dedicating staff to search for kin, assessing their processes for kin engagement, and enhancing assistance for kin throughout the home study process.

## FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT

### RESULTS:

ACS increased the number of new foster homes recruited by almost 50% from fy 2017 to fy 2019, turning around a previous six-year decline in the number of new foster homes recruited.

FY17-FY19 New Foster Home Recruitment

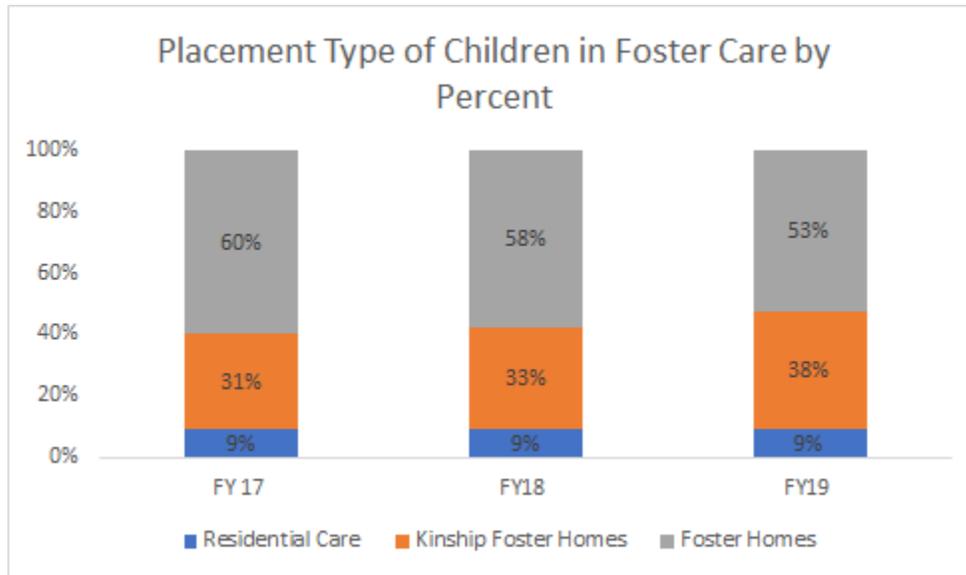


### KEY STRATEGIES

- In partnership with national experts Public Catalyst and Action Research, we have redesigned foster parent recruitment and support by utilizing best practice strategies, conducting targeted data and business process analysis and providing intensive workshops, trainings and technical assistance to support the foster care agencies' work in this critical area.
- A cohort of foster care agencies received additional funding to explore and implement a range of innovative strategies including hiring experienced and skilled foster parents in support and recruitment roles; piloting network and hub home models in which experienced foster parents provide support and mentoring to other foster parents; focusing recruitment efforts to identify caregivers in specific communities and for older youth; and strengthening their services and supports to foster parents by investing in specialized staff who provide in-home individualized coaching, respite and crisis management.

## REDUCING RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENTS

ACS continues to have more than 90% of foster children and youth in family-based care versus congregate care placements. For the past three years, ACS has maintained a 9% residential care placement rate. There has been a 19% decline in the number of youth placed in residential care since FY 2015.



## CHILDREN'S CENTER/OFFICE OF PLACEMENT

- The ACS Children's Center is a 24-7 reception center for children and youth who have been removed from their families due to child abuse and neglect. The Children's Center provides a safe and therapeutic environment for children and youth entering foster care. During the last three years, we have increased staffing and added dozens of new programs for children at the ACS Children's Center. ACS has also invested in facility enhancements, including a redesign of the nursery to support the developmental needs of young children, and will launch new programming rooms and a multi-sensory room for youth with developmental disabilities in FY 2020.
- In partnership with the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), NYS Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) and foster care agencies, ACS launched a new placement module in Connections that will support our work to match children with optimal foster care settings. Full implementation will be completed in FY 2020.

# SUCCESSFUL FUTURES: ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL & EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

ACS' Office of Education and Employment Initiatives supports training, technical assistance and capacity building for education, employment and college bound programs. The office works with ACS foster care agencies to ensure that children and youth receive the education, career readiness, vocational training, employment and supportive services they need. ACS is launching the Fair Futures initiative in FY 2020, which will expand services to improve education and employment outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

## IMPROVING EDUCATION OUTCOMES

ACS works in strong collaboration with its city partners--including the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD); the Department of Education (DOE); and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), as well as the City University of New York (CUNY) --to help insure that youth in foster care have access to the educational supports, services, and opportunities they need to thrive. An ACS team of Education Specialists provide case consultation, training, resource materials and technical assistance to ACS, foster care agency staff, youth and families on a variety of educational issues, including school stability/placement, transportation, special education and support services.

## INCREASING AFTER-SCHOOL ENRICHMENT FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

In FY 2019, ACS and DYCD signed a data-sharing MOU. Since then, ACS and DYCD conduct a regular data match that identifies whether 5th-8th grade DOE students in foster care are enrolled in DYCD after-school programs. ACS and DYCD use the results of this analysis to identify opportunities to **connect additional foster youth to after-school programs**. Dozens more children in foster care have been enrolled in DYCD after-school programs as a result of these matches.

## FIRSTSTAR

Since FY 2017, ACS has partnered with the FirstStar organization and the CUNY College at Staten Island (CSI) on an initiative aimed at preparing a cohort of youth to be college-ready. Specifically, the First Star CSI Academy program provides school year and summer academic and social-emotional support and is helping 25 ninth-grade youth in foster care stay on track for high school graduation and prepare for higher education. **The program has a 100% participant retention rate since its inception, with participants set to graduate from high school during FY 2020.**

## FOSTER PARENT GUIDE TO EDUCATION

Foster parents play a critical role in a child's education through the support they provide at home and at school. In Fall 2017, ACS released the Foster Parent Guide to Education. The goals of the guide are to:

- Help foster parents and caregivers understand developmental milestones
- Provide a better understanding of the Pre-K, Kindergarten, Middle School and High School admission processes and enrollment in New York City schools

- Support applications to college and/or vocational programs after high school
- Increase knowledge of alternative high school programs and schools for students that may need academic or social/emotional support services
- Provide information on other education related topics such as advocacy for LGBTQ students, services for pregnant/parenting teens, and students with language barriers

## FOSTERING COLLEGE SUCCESS INITIATIVE

Since the ACS Fostering College Success Initiative (FCSI) partnership (a.k.a. the Dorm Program) with CUNY launched in FY 2016, the program has expanded from serving 50 to 122 students. FCSI provides full tuition, room and board to participants, including year-round housing at dorm sites operated by Queens College, City College, and John Jay College. In partnership with The New York Foundling, students receive on-campus support services at each of these locations, including support from academic tutors and college success coaches. In addition, other students residing on campus at several public and private colleges throughout New York are also receiving stipends to support living expenses.

## EMPLOYMENT AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

In 2016, ACS first established an office dedicated to expanding career readiness, internship and employment services for youth in foster care. Over the past three years, many new programs have been established, serving thousands of youth in care.

- In April 2018, New Yorkers for Children, in partnership with ACS and Youth Villages, launched the YV LifeSet program in NYC. The program will serve 350 young people over three years with the goal of helping youth successfully transition to adulthood, with a specific focus on improving education, employment, and housing outcomes. To date, nearly 100 youth have been served in collaboration with Children's Aid and The New York Foundling.
- Since ACS launched a new Drivers Education Program in 2017, 250 youth have been referred.
- ACS partnered with the Pinkerton Foundation to fund a mentored-internship program that launched in January 2018 and has served more than 200 youth across twelve foster care agencies.
- More than 200 current and former foster and juvenile justice involved youth have enrolled in the Young Adult Internship Program PLUS (YAIP+) developed by the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) in partnership with ACS. More than half completed their internships, and many were hired into permanent jobs. An additional 30 % have continued to advance their educational goals.
- ACS partners with DYCD to support the Vulnerable Youth Summer Youth Employment Program (VY SYEP). During the summer of 2019, ACS and foster care agencies referred more than 1000 youth to SYEP.
- Ten foster care agencies (Cardinal McCloskey, Catholic Guardian, Children's Aid, Children's Village, Forestdale, HeartShare St. Vincent's, JCCA, Rising Ground, Sheltering Arms, and The New York Foundling) are implementing the Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers (YA WORC) model. The model offers intensive training and support from The Workplace Center at Columbia University, including enrolling students in career clubs. Since the initiative's inception in FY 2018, 212 youth have been served.

## EQUITY STRATEGIES & PARENT AND YOUTH VOICE

- The **Office of Equity Strategies (OES)** was founded in 2018 as part of ACS's Division of Child and Family Well-Being. OES focuses on addressing disparities related to race and ethnicity, income, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.
- ACS is committed to examining and **addressing racial inequity** through our policies and practices. We are focused on assessing and taking steps to address disparities in rates of abuse and neglect investigations; court-ordered supervision; foster care placements; lengths of stay in foster care; prevention case openings; community-based services; and detention and Close to Home admissions.
- ACS is committed to creating a safe and affirming environment where all young people can thrive, no matter their sexual orientation or gender-identity and expression. The **ACS Office of LGBTQ Equity Strategies** raises awareness and helps ensure that our services are affirming of LGBTQ youth and families.
- Launched in the fall of 2019 ACS is conducting the **first survey in NYC to assess how gender and sexual orientation** may impact a young person's experiences in foster care. This survey is the second of its kind in the country. The survey findings will be used to inform and further strengthen our strategies for providing high-quality and affirming services and supports for all youth.
- A key equity strategy for ACS is the full engagement of the voices of youth and parents.
  - In FY 2019, ACS created a new position, Parent Engagement Specialist, and hired a highly experienced parent advocate to take on this role. In FY 2020, led by the new Parent Engagement Specialist, ACS launched a **new Parent Advisory Council** to advise the Commissioner on ACS policy, programming and practices. This Council has formed a Steering Committee and selected a general membership and is currently developing its priorities.
  - In FY 2019, a **new ACS Youth Leadership Council** was launched to further engage youth and ensure their voices inform practice change. The Youth Council brings youth and adult leaders together to work in partnership on youth-related areas of policy, practices and/or services. Members of the council include youth currently and previously in foster care. The goals of the Council are to develop leadership skills of youth, to recommend policy improvements to address the needs of transition-age youth and supporting youth leadership initiatives across New York City.
  - Youth voice is a key component to improving the supports, services, and outcomes of youth in foster care. Launched in FY 2018, ACS continues to conduct its annual **Youth Experience Survey** to hear directly from

young people about their experiences in foster care. The FY 2018 and FY 2019 surveys had similar high response rates; almost half of eligible youth in foster care responded to the survey. Youth share insights on their home life, school, work, social activities, and well-being. The survey results help inform the work of ACS and its foster care agencies.



# INTERAGENCY FOSTER CARE TASK FORCE

The [Interagency Foster Care Task Force](#) was created following the enactment of Local Law 144 of 2016, signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio on November 16, 2016. Chaired by ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell, the Task Force includes stakeholders from across NYC who collaboratively developed 16 recommendations to improve services and outcomes for youth in and aging out of foster care. The recommendations span five broad categories: permanency, education, health and mental health, housing, and employment post-secondary education.

These recommendations were incorporated into the ACS Five Year Foster Care Strategic Blueprint issued in May 2018. ACS and its partners have been working aggressively to implement the recommendations. Highlights of achievements related to the Task Force include:

- Implemented new initiatives to increase kinship care and enhance Family Time practice (as described above). In FY 2020, we will be implementing \$2.8 million in new funding to further advance these initiatives.
- Established multiple new ACS education and employment initiatives; as well as expanded partnerships with DYCD, DOE, and CUNY (as described above). In FY 2020, we are implementing \$10 million in new funding to significantly expand this work through Fair Futures.
- Successful advocacy for ACS access to New York State's PSYCKES database, which provides information on diagnosis, medications and mental health services for children in foster care.



# STRENGTHENING FOSTER CARE AGENCY CASE PRACTICE

- ACS continues to implement an intensive provider oversight, accountability and a continuous quality improvement system that includes:
- Monthly safety checks of each foster care agency to ensure that every child and family is being visited and seen on the appropriate schedule.
- Monthly data reports with key indicators directly related to the goals of the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint.
- Statistically representative case review audits performed twice a year on every foster care agency.
- Quarterly outcomes analyses of each foster care agency's key targets, along with quarterly monitoring sessions.
- Annual foster care agency Scorecard assessing each agency's overall performance.
- Heightened Monitoring and Corrective Action plans when necessary.

## CASE CONSULTATION & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- In FY 2017, ACS established the Office of Strategic Program Support to provide technical assistance to help foster care agencies implement best practices, utilize data, improve business processes, enhance performance management strategies, and implement special initiatives.
- In FY 2017, ACS established a new function to provide case practice technical assistance to provider agencies. Since then Senior Practice Consultants have provided on site consultations for thousands of cases and assisted foster care agencies in improving permanency performance.
- In FY 2016, ACS established the Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI) process to work in partnership with every foster care agency to develop and implement a continuous quality improvement plan. These plans have resulted in measurable improvements in key practice areas including casework contacts with parents, parent/child visits and supervision of case planners. ACS and foster care agencies partner through this process to identify emerging performance issues and to proactively develop solutions for improving practice.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR CHILD WELFARE STAFF

Since its creation in 2016, the ACS Workforce Institute has been providing ongoing professional skills development of foster care agency staff, including direct service case planning staff and their supervisors and managers. The Institute is a partnership between ACS and the City University of New York (School of Professional Studies and the Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work). The Institute allows ACS to offer a range of critical training and professional development opportunities in child welfare best practice to foster care agency staff, including:

- **Training in evidence-based models serving children and families in foster care:**
  - Attachment and Bio-Behavioral Catch Up (ABC);
  - Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS-NY); and
  - Partnering for Success (PFS).
- **Training in the foundational courses Motivational Interviewing and Building Coaching Competency as well as specialized courses:**
  - Safety and Risk: Investigation, Synthesis, and Assessment
  - Child Sexual Abuse: Protective Strategies
  - Identifying and Addressing Intimate Partner Violence
  - Understanding and Undoing Implicit Bias
  - Motivational Interviewing: Engaging Families with Repeat Involvement in the Child Welfare System
  - Motivational Interviewing: Engaging Girls and Young Women
  - Motivational Interviewing: Engaging Fathers
  - Engaging Parents with Cognitive and Other Developmental Limitations
- **Training through eLearning programs:**
  - Applying the Mental Health Principles
  - Asthma Basics: Home-Based Services for Self-Directed Asthma Care
  - Identifying and Working with Families with Native American Heritage
  - Evidence Based Models
  - Family Team Conferencing Overview
  - FTC Management Review Process
  - Mandated Reporter Training: Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse and Maltreatment
  - Medicine Safety for Children
  - NYC Preschool and Early Child Care Food Allergy Training
  - Trauma: How It Impacts the Brain, Development & Behavior
- **Training on open adoption, delivered in partnership with Fostering Change for Children.**
- **Training to build the capacity of staff to prepare youth for careers and the world of work, delivered in partnership with the Workplace Center at Columbia School of Social Work.**

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

ACS is in the process of re-procuring the vast majority of contracts across the child welfare system, including contracts for delivering prevention services, family-based foster care services and residential foster care services. These procurements represent a significant opportunity for ACS to reassess existing services for children and families and to identify and implement new strategies and approaches to improve outcomes for New York City children and families.

In anticipation of these procurements, ACS has undertaken an intensive research and planning process that includes assessing the current array of services to identify strengths, gaps and opportunities, conducting extensive data analysis, researching best practices in the field and gathering extensive input from key stakeholders and expert informants. ACS conducted interviews and focus groups with hundreds of key stakeholders and expert informants including youth, families, communities, prevention and foster care agency staff, legal advocates, representatives from philanthropy, subject matter experts and others. ACS also formed a Provider Advisory Committee through which prevention and foster care agency staff at all levels provided extensive input on system strengths, gaps and opportunities.

ACS is committed to a shared framework across prevention and foster care services that results in a more robust, comprehensive and seamless system that enables children and families to experience improved outcomes for safety, permanency and well-being. The three procurements for prevention, family based foster care and residential foster care services are being designed to reflect and advance this shared framework.

New prevention contracts will begin on July 1, 2020. The Concept Paper for Family Based Foster Care and Residential Foster care was released in fall 2019, with the RFP to be released in 2020, with new contracts to be in place as of July 1, 2021.



## OUR PARTNERSHIPS

New Yorkers for Children (NYFC) is a special partner to ACS. Since 1996, NYFC and ACS have worked together to protect, ensure, and promote the safety and well-being of NYC's children and families. In this partnership, NYFC provides fundraising, grants management and program management support for key ACS initiatives, with a focus on youth in foster care.

### FOSTER CARE AGENCIES

Abbott House	Little Flower Children and Family Services
Cardinal McCloskey	Lutheran Social Services
Catholic Guardian Services	Martin De Porres
Cayuga Centers	MercyFirst
Children's Aid	New Alternatives for Children
Children's Village	The New York Foundling
Coalition for Hispanic Family Services	OHEL Children's Home and Family Services
Forestdale, Inc.	Rising Ground
Good Shepherd Services	SCO Family of Services
Graham Windham	Seamen's Society for Children and Families
HeartShare St. Vincent's Services	Sheltering Arms
The Jewish Board	St. Dominic's Home
JCCA	St. John's

### NATIONAL EXPERTS AND FOUNDATIONS

Action Research Partners	National Implementation Research Network
Casey Family Programs	National Center for Evidence Based Practice in Child Welfare, University of Maryland, School of Social Work
Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)	New York Community Trust
Chapin Hall	New Yorkers For Children
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation	Public Catalyst
Dave Thomas Foundation	Redlich Horwitz Foundation
Doris Duke Foundation	Tiger Foundation
Fostering Change for Children	Pinkerton Foundation
Ira W. DeCamp Foundation	The Workplace Center at the Columbia School of Social Work
Joseph LeRoy and Ann C. Warner Fund	
Foster America	



**NYC** Children